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## Plot against the Pope

Pope on May 13, 1981, were actually given out by the Bulgarian secret police, acting for the man who is now the head of the Soviet Union.

Even if the facts are as clear as they can ever be short of a confession by Andropov, certain things can safely be predicted. A powerful wing of the Italian government will plead the inadvisability of publishing evidence that would convince all reasonable men. Why? Because, they will plead, Italy does not want to act in such a way as ultimately to victimize itself. If it were so that Andropov had commissioned the execution of the Pope, the Italian government (it would be held) would have no way of getting back at Andropov.

It will be argued that to dramatize Andropov's responsibility would be to invite the humiliation of Italy: the country that a) could not defend the leader of the largest religious body in the world; and then b) could do nothing about the man who gave orders to have him shot.

3. Whether Judge Martella will be persuaded to go along is another question. The Italian government's dominion of the judiciary is by no means complete, and Martella may very well take the position that it is up to the diplomats to decide what to do about it, up to him to report to the Chamber of Deputies what is the evidence he has. We can assume he has more than he has released, else he would not have proceeded to detain the alleged co-conspirator. And whatever it is that inflamed the minister of defense, it cannot have been information exonerating the KGB from responsibility.

What, then, if Martella issues his report and the evidence is sufficient

to persuade reasonable men of Soviet complicity? What then do we do? Probably nothing. What then do we say? Probably not very much. What then do we think? Nothing, really, that we should not already have thought: namely that the Soviet Union acknowledges no scruples when it is bent on helping itself.

It was bent on helping itself, in May of 1981, by removing the most galvanizing symbol of Christian liberty that has arisen in the postwar world. The elimination of Pope John Paul was at least as desirable to Andropov as the elimination of Winston Churchill would have been to Adolf Hitler. Those who insist that we should all speak humbly because, in the past, the United States has been implicated, however obliquely, in plots against foreign leaders have only the problem, if they wish to be taken seriously, of maintaining that a plot against the life of Adolf Hitler is the equivalent of a plot against the life of Winston Churchill.

4. What do we then conclude? Unfortunately, that in fact the cause of Polish freedom was set back, and in part because of the enfeeblement of the Pope.

Assassinations, the superstitions to the contrary notwithstanding, often work. So do botched assassinations. We need to ask ourselves the question: Will the Soviet Union emerge stronger, or weaker, more to be feared or less to be feared—if it is established that she was guilty? It is privately reported that the Pope is himself convinced that the Soviets were the author of the attempt on his life. It will strain his Christian commitment to pray that they will be forgiven because they know not what they do.

CONCERNING the question whether the Soviet Union ordered the assassination of Pope John Paul II, a few observations:

1. It is correct that we—i.e., the public—do not have in hand the facts on the basis of which it can be affirmed that the Soviet Union was behind the whole thing. Judge Martella of Rome, who has been investigating the case, is evidently a gentleman of some discretion, but also of some tenacity. Beyond giving as the reason for arresting Mr. Antonov that he was a co-conspirator with the assassin, Judge Martella has been quiet.

But his discretion has not prevented others, who can be assumed to be well-informed about Martella's investigations, from venting their suspicions, notably the minister of defense, Mr. Lagorio, who has publicly stated that for all intents and purposes, the Soviet Union has committed an act of war. That he didn't mention the Soviet Union by name is the only concession to protocol in his statement. Nobody thought the minister of defense was accusing Monaco.

2. It is by no means clear that the public will ever learn, for sure, whether the instructions to shoot the

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